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One-on-One

20 September 1999



My meeting with Ivanov on Monday evening was mostly one-on-one, and this format elicited a great many (seemingly) candid comments from him, mainly on three topics: Russian politics; economic reform and corruption; terrorism and the Caucasus. We touched on Russian-American relations and a few other subjects as well.

Declassification Authority: Geoffrey W. Chapman, Senior Reviewer, A/GIS/IPS 1/22/2020

Russian Politics and Elections

Ivanov expects the parliamentary elections in December to produce a more moderate, weaker Duma; he predicts that neither Luzhkov's Otechestvo nor the Communists will do as well as they hope. In part as a result, the presidential race will come down to a contest between Primakov and Putin. Yavlinsky, Zyuganov, Zhirinovskiy have no chance; Luzhkov probably won't

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Classified by Ambassador Stephen Sestanovich, S/NIS
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even run. As between Primakov and Putin, Ivanov says his old boss has no answers for Russia's structural problems; he has grand ideas of a theoretical sort, but is not strong in practice. By contrast, Putin is an effective administrator, and this suits the needs of the moment. As Ivanov sees it, there will be no more revolutionary changes; the changes that have already taken place have demolished all institutions, and what is needed is someone who can do the detail-work of establishing new procedures for getting things done. Putin is that kind of guy, and will be able to count on the support of youth, and of "reformers."

He will also have, it became clear, Ivanov's support. Putin has given his foreign minister a lot of autonomy, which Ivanov appreciates; he added that Putin is getting more immersed in arms control. He said that he would like to find ways of bringing Putin into greater contact with senior Americans. The Vice President's time to pursue this channel will be limited, he believes. Ivanov said he hoped we can make the most of the next opportunity for meetings with Putin at the Istanbul Summit in November.

As for Primakov, Ivanov feels he cannot win without the support of the Communists, and that this dependence is, on

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balance, a liability for him -- it's a further reflection of the fact that he is not a new man but a product of the past.

Caucasus

If elections go off as scheduled, Ivanov sees Putin and Primakov as the real contenders, but he does see a scenario in which Lebed could emerge -- one involving a state of emergency and a widespread recognition that the situation in the Caucasus had simply gotten out of control. A Yeltsin resignation involving a transfer of power to Lebed is not likely, but evidently not to be ruled out.

As for the crisis that Russia faces in Dagestan, Ivanov believes that it is, if only precariously, under greater control. The borders of the region -- whether Russia's with Chechnya, Chechnya's with Dagestan, or Georgia's with Chechnya -- are porous and gaining control over them will be hard, but doing so -- rather than waging all-out war with the Chechens -- will be Russia's priority and strategy. The large number of Chechens, Azeris, Armenians, and others living across Russia (often illegally) further complicate the matter.

Over the longer run, Ivanov argued, Russia faces an interconnected Islamist terrorist alliance -- with bases in

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Bosnia, Chechnya and the rest of the Caucasus, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Stalin's policies, while brutal, recognized that the Chechens were always trying to undermine Russia, and to acquire their own strong position on the Black Sea.

As for Russia's dealings with other Caucasus governments, Ivanov did not conceal his dislike of Shevardnadze, whom he accuses of playing politics with terrorism and ethnic issues. Shevardnadze, he says, has made up assassination plots against him, and rejected a deal that could have been struck to return Georgian refugees to the Gali district in Abkhazia. Ivanov claims that Shevardnadze's own foreign minister admitted to him that electoral considerations made the deal unattractive. Beating up the Russians is a much better campaign gambit.

Aliyev also came in for Ivanov's criticism: like Shevardnadze, he was in the Politburo in the old days, and the two of them had no trouble getting along at that time; now all the two of them do is complain about each other. (This is an odd comment, and may show Ivanov's lack of surefootedness in Caucasus affairs. In reality, Shevardnadze and Aliyev were far from close in the past, but have obviously made the decision to warm up their relations recently for one overriding reason: doing so made urgent strategic sense.)

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Economic Reform and Corruption

Our discussion of economics gave Ivanov another chance to ping Shevardnadze: he and Gorbachev had made a big deal of putting all ideas out for discussion during *perestroika*, but they'd never figured out a serious program of economic reform. By the time Yeltsin came in, nothing positive had been done on the economy, and it was necessary to do a great deal all at once. This was the period when Russia put itself in the hands of foreign economic advisers; Ivanov says he doesn't blame those advisers (here he is much more tolerant than Primakov), but he asks why these advisers are now so bitterly critical of Russia. Here he asked about Larry Summers: why is he so aggressive in charging Russia with mistakes? (He notes, in passing, that those whom Summers allegedly likes best -- Nemstov, Kiriyenko -- definitely won't be in the next Duma; their party won't clear 5%.)

As for the current controversy over corruption, Ivanov's attitude is the world-weary one; didn't everyone know that such things were going on? And since everyone did, how could the *New York Times'* campaign against Russia be explained? I explained that the timing was dictated by the course of our law-enforcement investigation, which moved on its own track.

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(Like those bombers flying toward Alaska that I didn't know anything about, Ivanov observed ruefully.)

Adding a personal note, Ivanov said that he makes \$300 a month, and so has no need to take bribes. It's the guys who only make \$100 who are vulnerable, he says. Again, a rueful note: we should have seen this corruption problem coming, what with millionaires popping up all over. But, he noted, the days of free-spending and suitcases-full-of-cash are already in the past. Now there are more limits on how people deal with their new wealth; the fanciest restaurants are suffering.

Ivanov clearly recognizes the changes that the corruption issue will bring. He observed that Chernomyrdin is, or will soon be, in the U.S. (against Ivanov's advice to postpone his trip). Naturally, Viktor Stepanovich wants to see the Vice President, but, why, asks Ivanov, would the VP want to have his picture taken with Chernomyrdin now?

Russia-American Relations

We briefly touched on arms control. Ivanov said the Duma was unpredictable, and he doubted that START 2 could be ratified in this session. All the same, he was charged with

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trying, and they would try again in the next Duma if they fail now. In the meantime, Ivanov clearly wants to make more of an effort to affect U.S. elite opinion. He has arranged to speak at the Council on Foreign Relations and at my suggestion was also doing the *Times* editorial board. He asked whether there wasn't some way he could meet with members of Congress too. He said his message to the Council would be that the U.S. had three needs from Russia -- stability inside Russia, continued reform, and a consistent foreign policy. I agree, and said so. I also set out our thinking, reiterating our arguments as to why the limited national missile defense we have in mind won't really threaten Russia, particularly given the President's commitment to pursue it cooperatively. I further observed that it was a big loss for us that Yeltsin is no longer capable of meeting the President for the kind of sustained discussion of big problems that they used to have (as they did, for example, at Helsinki).

Other Issues

Among issues before us at this UNGA, Ivanov agreed to work on a Taliban resolution. On the Middle East ministerial meeting that we've been pursuing, he predicted that the Lebanese and Syrian foreign ministers would decline our invitation. (Ivanov also related an exchange he'd recently

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had with Assad, who apparently asked him out of the blue whether he was Jewish. Er, why do you ask? said Ivanov, to which Assad replied that he wanted to know since Primakov was, he'd been surprised to learn, Jewish. Sorry, said Ivanov, I'm not.) Finally, it seems that Ivanov's deputy was just in Belgrade, and found Milosevic extremely confident. There's no way, says Ivanov, to get him out, and adds that General Perisic agrees.

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